

## Triduum to Mary

REV. JOHN K. SHARP

*"And the Lord God said to the serpent: I shall put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed, and she shall crush thy head."*

OUR Catholic Faith and practice link together the holy names of Jesus and Mary. We phrase these names together in the prayers of our hearts and the aspirations of our lips; we place the images of Jesus and Mary on our altars; and we find these two together in the world's most famous works of art. In short, we "go to Jesus through Mary." This is no vain or silly custom, humanly invented. There is Divine sanction in this association, for it has been made by God and none may separate the Mother and Child joined by Him. God requires worship of Jesus and veneration of Mary, for He, the Creator, has associated Himself with Mary, the creature, in the principal actions that refer to our salvation. Mary, under her title the Immaculate Conception, figures in the promise given man after his fall in Paradise; again, in the giving to the world its Saviour at the Incarnation and Nativity; and finally in the Passion and Death of Christ, suffering with Him for us and so bringing us even more fully into that unique association.

We select for the subject of our thought the part played by the Immaculate Conception in these three principle truths of our Faith, truths which we may liken to so many arches that span the triple abyss of time, starting from the healthy and holy origin our race once knew in the earthly paradise, carrying us through our present existence and reaching with us to our destiny in Heaven.

### I—THE FALL OF MAN AND THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Wise and good men have looked upon the world and have said that God exists, for "the heavens declare His

glory and the firmament is His handiwork." Yes, God exists and all the works of His hands are good and only the fool hath declared in his folly there is no God. But if we look more closely we may observe also an at least seeming contradiction. We need but to consider with Newman the history of this world, the diverse races of men, their forms of worship and governments, their conflicts and aimless courses—"like a prophet's scroll, full of lamentation and mourning and woe"; we need but consider the individual's greatness—and his littleness; need but consider his life, compact of far-reaching aims and short duration; the defeat of good, and the success of evil; the physical pain and the mental anguish; the prevalence of sin and corruption and the curtain that veils the future darkly—so many "having no hope and without God in this world."

We are appalled at such problems without human solution. Either, we say, there is no God, or men have been discarded from His presence. And Faith steps in to tell us the reason is correct, that there is a Creator and that He is good, and that after the creation He pronounced all things good but that a terrible aboriginal calamity, Original Sin, changed this world from Paradise to the place it is, of good and evil.

### THE FALL

It is the fall of the race at its birth that explains this world to man and man to himself as nothing else can.

Man is composed of two opposite elements, spirit and matter. The one belongs outside time and space, and the other belongs to things tangible. These two elements were once wedded together so that the lower ministered to the higher in a perfect balance of reason and imagination, of will and feelings. God might have created man with all that his nature demanded for its perfect human happiness—as trees and animals, though they have no reason nor will—and even that state would have been wonderful.

But that was not enough. God did more. He lifted man up above the plane of earth to Heaven, from the natural to the supernatural, and brought man into the Divine family, into the life of grace, and illumined his

soul with His presence, inflamed his heart with His love and enabled him to see God in all His creatures.

Now, just as we test a man for a position to see if he be fit, so God, who tested the angels and found some of them ungrateful, tested man. His supernatural gifts were given man on condition that he pass a, to us, somewhat mysterious test. What did the command not to eat of the fruit involve? Many things, but chiefly an obligation for the creature in some way to submit himself to his Creator. If he failed to observe it, it could only be because pride of some sort—a preference for, a reliance upon, the natural instead of the supernatural—held sway in his heart.

Man disobeyed, lost in the test, and consequently destroyed the supernatural and wounded his nature. So the world became the thing of sorrow it is, ugly in many respects, dangerous, perhaps even harmful to man, instead of beautiful and helpful, just as light once welcome to the healthy eye is painful to the injured one. The essential thing, grace, the presence of God, was gone from his soul and left it as a lamp without light, as the monstace without the Host. So man, of all creatures, became unhappy and was left without peace of mind, wistful, striving, disconsolate, as an animal might be who had once the power of speech and then lost it. And this longing and sense of loss led men often to try to satisfy themselves with the falsely beautiful things of earth and men fell down and worshipped before idols of flesh and blood. But in vain, there was no satisfaction in these for the children of wrath.

#### THE PROMISE

But the darkness of that mysterious, oriental tragedy was lit up for us with a promise, like the rainbow after the flood, of a new Eve, Mary, and of a new Adam, Christ, who would be victorious over the tempter. "And the Lord God said to the serpent: I shall place enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed, and she shall crush thy head." The Immaculate Conception of Mary was involved in this new and better order of things that was to transform the race.

Yet while the promise was held out to the children

of men and was later fulfilled, even so the punishment fell upon the race. "For as by one man sin entered this world and by sin death, so death has come upon all men." Benedict Arnold in betraying his trust lost his property and citizenship and had he children they also would have lost those rights, although through no fault of their own. So we, through no fault of ours, enter this world deprived of our rights to the citizenship of the Kingdom of Heaven. "Behold," says the Psalmist, "I was conceived in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." Baptism takes away our inherited original sin and restores that lost grace, but our nature is still wounded and the healing is a long, painful process. We are without that moral balance that Adam had, we are as an inexperienced horseman on a powerful charger. Tempted by concupiscence, cloyed by sin and oppressed with its misery, we are as persons, once of wealth and culture, banished to a desolate island and haunted with the memory of former power and grandeur. The struggle finally ends at death and the healing of fallen nature is completed in Purgatory.

### THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The Immaculate Conception is in refreshing contrast to all this. She who was immaculate from the start, is also the help promised to retain or regain our baptismal innocence, for she is the woman that crushed the serpent's head. Mary is "our tainted nature's solitary boast," "the great wonder that appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars": who only can say, "In me the devil hath not anything." She is a type of the power of grace and the loveliness that is God's, sweet and musical, gentle and glorious, the ancient promise fulfilled, our present help.

### II—THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND THE INCARNATION

*"Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee."*

All through that long and gloomy advent before the coming of Christ, the promise and hope of a Redeemer

given to our first parents after their fall, had shone, now brightly, now feebly, but always it persisted. Meanwhile, tainted at its source, the race increased and multiplied in numbers and in sin, an ever-widening and iniquitous stream. Of the first children of our first parents, one murdered another. Even after the Flood's purification, God's chosen people had time and again broken His laws and stilled His voice, speaking in their hearts; and, just as often, by warnings and punishments He had brought them back to Himself. Here and there through the ugly record the promise of the New Woman and the New Man gleamed like a golden thread in a coarsely textured material; hints were cast out in types and prophecies that grew in distinctness with the centuries. The rest of the race had wandered far from God, "had changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their hearts, unto uncleanness. . ."

Yet even among these Gentiles were minds of pure and philosophic cast, worshiping God in spirit and in truth and holding themselves in readiness for some manifestation that they perceived was coming. Then, while the whole creation was in travail and men would not listen to the God who spoke in their hearts, He went outside them, assumed flesh and spoke to their senses, forcing them to listen. "For God who in times past and in divers manners has spoken through the prophets to His people has in these, our days, spoken to us by His Son." And the Redeemer slipped quietly into the world as a timid child into a room full of its elders.

#### THE COMING OF GOD TO EARTH

It was extraordinary, this coming of God to earth. But it was His earth and it had gone wrong extraordinarily. In fact, some theologians tell us that God would have become man even had we not sinned—not indeed as a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, but with an impassible and glorified humanity, assuming the headship of the race, raising it above the angelic creation and wedding it to the family of the Three Divine Persons. So the unspeakably fair and glorious Christ would

appeal to us but not so deeply as He does in the beauty of the Divine Lover who emptied Himself of His glory and suffered for us. More wonderful, then, is that grace restored than were the lost gifts of Paradise, and the Church takes cognizance of this when she signs on Holy Saturday: "Oh happy fault of Adam to merit such a Redeemer."

Christ Himself epitomizes His entire ministry in the parable of the Good Samaritan. There He speaks of humanity fallen among thieves, left lying by the wayside, robbed and stripped and half-dead. Then He, the Good Samaritan, drew nigh and bound up our wounds and poured in oil and wine and walked on foot, that we might ride at our ease, and so took us to the shelter and hospitality of His Church, there to be cared for and ministered to until His return.

The Redeemer played that rôle of Good Samaritan by taking human form of the most pure substance of the Virgin Mary, taking the things of sense to heal the sins of sense. The material world, the bodily senses, the mind and will, had sinned. But His wisdom and power chose these, the very instruments and causes of sin, as the instruments and causes of our saving. The old Latin hymn sings of it—

For flesh hath cleansed what flesh hath stained  
And God's own flesh as flesh hath reigned.

This purification of the race through God's taking human flesh demanded preparation of the woman who was to bear the God-Man. The decree of the Incarnation almost made necessary the Immaculate Conception; certainly it made it most fitting. The all-perfect God could scarcely unite Himself with anything that might, so to speak, taint His holiness. But human nature was corrupt from the beginning and first it needed cleansing from all stain of sin. Mary was to be His Mother, not merely His nurse, servant, teacher or friend. How our love should adorn our mothers had we the power! The Almighty had love and power and wisdom and nothing was left undone. That cleansing preparation took place when Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, St. Anne, in response to those laws which govern all hu-

man conception, but in her, uniquely immaculately, without original sin. For at that instant the grace of God united with and sanctified her human nature. Later, at the Incarnation, God was to take from hers, His own, a purified human nature with which to restore our fallen nature. "And the Word was made flesh," miraculously, through the power of the Holy Ghost. God was His Father and Mary Immaculate, His Mother, so she is the Mother of that unique Person, Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Mary is the Mother of God. By uniting the Divine and the human in this world, she has made it possible for all humanity to be reunited with Divinity in this life and to enter the abode of Divinity, Heaven, in the next.

The new Eve and the new Adam had appeared. By means of God's mercy and of Christ's and Mary's humility, the promise made in the Garden of Eden was kept and the redemption of the race was at hand.

### III—THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND THE REDEMPTION

*"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother and Jesus saith to His disciple, 'Behold thy Mother.'"*

Men had lifted up their hands against their Maker and had sinned. Appropriate atonement was necessary to compensate the outrage of God's holiness and justice and to heal our nature. The offering of incense, the blood of sacrificial animals, the piteous cries of men availed nothing. Therefore the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity said: "Sacrifice and burnt offerings thou wouldst not; behold I come to do thy will, O God." He bowed down the heavens and came, for God only could wipe out the debt and buy us back.

Evil, however, is the privation of some good and God cannot suffer it, for He has all goodness in Himself. Only by uniting Himself with some thing that can suffer, by making it really His own, can God suffer and so with infinite reparation right the wrong that sin has done. Mary furnished that human nature, like ours in all save sin, that was united with the Divine nature to form one person; and so this Divine Person, the God-

Man, walked the earth, loved, suffered and offered infinite homage to God.

#### MARY'S REDEMPTION

Mary, as well as the race, was redeemed, but differently. An example may make clear the difference. There is a physician, let us say, with two patients. One has consumption and the doctor cures him. The other is well but the doctor foresees that he will contract the disease unless he takes preventive treatment. The second patient takes this treatment and is saved. Each owes his life to the doctor; one was cured, the other preserved. So Christ redeemed the race and Mary. Because of His merits she was preserved immaculate from original sin, and, by her cooperation with grace, from all actual sin. Because of His merits we are cured after contracting the disease of sin, whether it be original or actual. She was saved by prevention; we, by cure.

Because of her personally holy life and because of her office, Mary was associated with the redemptive sufferings of Christ in a much more personal way than we. And, her sufferings, like Christ's, began with her sinless entrance into the sinful world. The Presentation in the Temple, the Flight into Egypt, all her dolors, culminating at Calvary and continuing after, until her Assumption into heaven, earned for her the title of Mother of Sorrows. "Call me not Noemi, that is beautiful one, but Mara, that is, sorrowful, for the Lord hath filled me with bitterness." The words of Christ from the cross: "Woman, behold thy son; Son, behold thy Mother," fixed for all times the Immaculate Conception's title of Co-Redemptrix.

#### MARY THE MOTHER OF MEN

Mother of God by conception she is mother of men by adoption. Mother-love is a theme that has furnished the poet with loftiest thought, has caused the painter to make his canvas speak and has given the sculptor the power to breathe the cold marble into life. The Church, even, after exhausting the poetry of liturgy and of language, exclaims, "How to praise thee I know not." We give the name mother, in imitation, to other dear



things, as school, country, church. Yet the unfailing love, the fostering care, the tender compassion of these mothers are but shadows of Mary's mothering of us. On our part, as good children, we are called to love and serve that mother with all that love and service implies.

The Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation and Redemption were made possible by Mary's humility and the humility of her Son. Humility is the basis of all virtue and all greatness in our lives as well, even though it is the antithesis of the spirit of the world. Nay, rather because of it, for the "world is seated in iniquity." Emerson, the apostle of American thought, tells us that "all virtues are summed up in self trust," but a greater teacher, Christ, has said: "He that exalts himself shall be humbled and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." Only by humble imitation now of Mary and her Son may we sing with her later, her song of humility and exaltation before the throne of God: "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, because He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid—and holy is His name."

## The Cry of the Orphan

F. M. BROWNE, S.J.

*Sermon delivered in the Church of St. Michael, Dun Laoghaire, in behalf of the Orphanage. Reprinted from the "Irish Catholic."*

*"And he that shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me" (Mat. xvii, 5).*

I HAVE been asked, dearly-beloved brethren of Dun Laoghaire, to put before you the cause of St. Joseph's Orphanage, Tivoli Road. In years gone by, your fathers first, then yourselves, gave generously to its support. God grant that the few words I am about to speak to you may rouse once more—nay, rather, quicken—that noble impulse of charity that fostered from the first this Christlike work in your midst. It were impertinent of me to recount for you the history of the orphanage. Plain, substantial, eminently prac-

tical, it has watched for nearly three-quarters of a century the growth of new Dun Laoghaire. For the majority of you it has been one of the landmarks of the township for all the years that your memory can compass. For those whose thoughts the sunset of a long life is now ending with the golden afterglow of memory, St. Joseph's, Tivoli Road, recalls the untiring energy and unselfish devotedness of a little group of gallant women. Kathleen O'Ferrall, whose heart conceived the project and whose courage achieved success, lies in her grave beneath the Dublin hills. Around her, sleeping their last long sleep, lie nearly all her brave companions; a few, around whom are gathered a younger generation of dauntless workers, still live to carry on her work for the orphan children of your town.

#### THE CHILD'S APPEAL TO THE HEART

There are few works that so appeal to the hearts of men as the care of children. God has planted in the heart of every sentient creature an instinct of attraction towards its offspring and the weaker things of its kind. The tigress that will rend and tear the strongest animal of another species will fight to desperation in defence of her cubs. On a wide Australian sheep-run I have watched a merino ewe defy the blustering and noisy onslaught of a sheep dog when her little new-born lamb lay helpless on the scanty grass of the paddock. This instinct of the lower animals when reproduced in man is ennobled by the spirituality of his soul. That which is in the beasts but a blind, irresistible impulse of Nature becomes in man a virtue. Springing, it is true, from Nature, it reigns under the fostering, controlling, and directing care of free will as queen among the natural virtues; when further sublimated by the Divine alchemy of grace, it ranks second only to that Love which unites the heart of man to the Heart of God; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and greatest Commandment. And the second is like unto this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

This love finds its sweetest and tenderest expression in the love and gentleness, that all that is noble in man-

kind has ever shown towards the weak and suffering of every class, but more especially towards weak and suffering childhood. Only when paganism has covered with its hideous leprosy the human heart, and immorality, paganism's inseparable companion, has poisoned the very arteries of its life, does man forget this primal instinct of his soul. Affection and love for children blossom among the most barbarous and primitive races of the world. It is only when man has been raised above the state of barbarism by civilization, and then, being corrupted by luxury, has forsaken again the ideals of his race, that children and the suffering have been left unsuccored. Thus it was in ancient Rome when debauchery was hurrying it on to ruin. Thus is it today in pagan China, where the degrading superstitions of centuries have debased the characters of men. Thus is it in the civilized but dechristianized Europe of today, in which side by side with the gilded worship of wealth and immorality has grown up the need for societies for the prevention of cruelty to children. It has been well said that in the character of a man who does not love children there must be some flaw. However high he be in moral principle, however stainless in moral conduct, there is always in such a man a trace of selfishness. However condescending his forbearance, however generous his mercy, there is in him a lack of sympathy which is akin to hardness.

#### THE CHILD'S HEART

On the other hand, those whom children love are really lovable, for children with unerring instinct know whom to love. The heart of a child is like a delicate and exquisitely sensitive orchid that opens its petals of mottled gold to every ray of sunshine, and swings with gentle swaying to every breath of warmth, but shrinks within its sheath of green at the slightest sign of roughness. When you look into the eyes of a child you see behind their clear and steady gaze a soul unsullied by sin, and unclouded by deceit. A child that is childlike is truthful, frank, outspoken, trustful, and God has placed beside its little life the props around whose strength the tendrils of its heart may twine. On one

side stands the love and tenderness of its mother's heart, and on the other towers the trust-inspiring strength and gentle power of its father's arm. Within the safe and holy keeping of its home, sheltered from the numbing of neglect and from the withering of unkindness, the child's soul grows apace, its limbs gain form and strength, until with head erect and heart undaunted it can meet undismayed a world that knows no sympathy. And as he goes through life, misunderstood perhaps, and thwarted at every turn, the man whose childhood's days had thus been guarded will still be heartened by the memory of the twain whose love first answered his.

But what if the reaper death—or separation, worse than death—should shear away those props before the little soul is steeled to meet the icy blasts of cold neglect? Where can the little soul turn? Must it shrivel up and lose its bloom ere yet that bloom be full? Are the seeds of virtue and of human endeavor to die unfructified within its little heart, as dies the fruit upon the tree when late May frosts have nipped the blossom from the bough? Such should be its fate, such should be the world's loss, such would have been the loss to your own town, dear brethren of Dun Laoghaire, had not the gallant women, for whose cause I plead with you today, opened their arms to gather in a gentle embrace the little girls whom they shelter in the orphanage on Tivoli Road. In their hearts the motherless children find all that womanly tenderness means, and womanly tenderness when wedded to true Christian charity is the nearest earthly reflex of a mother's love. In the steady, unchanging generosity of your charity, that year by year gives to these ladies the means to continue their work, the fatherless find the protecting strength of a father's arm. Dearly beloved brethren, will that arm fail them today? Will you betray their trust?

#### THE TEACHING OF CHRIST

So far we have sought to draw our inspiration from the innate impulses and inborn instincts of our nature. Come with me higher now. Not only are we men—we are Christians, followers of Christ, who, if our professions be genuine, must be the central point of all our

lives, the lodestone of our every action. Christianity, as a system of religion, differs in this from every other system, that it make loyalty to a person, not loyalty to a doctrine, the one essential of membership. Think not, dear brethren, that in saying this I would make light of doctrinal definition or theological teaching. Nay, I would insist all the more upon them, as the only safeguard and guarantee of our love and loyalty to the true Christ.

Once in days that are gone I stood, a traveler, on the terraced slopes of Pau. Across the brawling, blue green Gave I saw the foothills tawny with the russet gold of autumn. Beyond them the interlacing ranges lifted one's gaze, foot by foot, to the distant horizon, where the snow-capped summits of the Pyrenees cut like the jagged teeth of a giant saw into the cloudless southern sky. Their line was jagged, yes, but almost horizontal, save where the glistening Pic du Midi towered in lonely grandeur, thousands of feet above the lesser heights around. Even as I watched it out of the fleckless blue there came a wraith of mist that seemed to clothe in filmy airiness its rugged cliffs and glittering snow slopes. The wraith became a mist, the mist a cloud, until the mountain's form was but a shrunken ghost of its own true self. Brethren, over the cloudless sky of Apostolic love and Gospel truth have come with the passing of centuries and the chilling of men's hearts the clouds of doubt and error. Around the figure of Christ they have wrapped their clammy cerecloth, until the Christ to whom poor men are often asked to give their loyalty, is only a misshapen and truncated image of the Christ who walked in Galilee. To keep for men the truth, to sweep from before their eyes the clouds of error and of heresy, is the function of true theology and unerring doctrine. Led by their light, guided by their words, we can walk securely back the ways of time to find Him standing, as in very truth He stood, Christ the Incarnate Son of God, the Saviour and the Lover of our race. With ears attuned by them to catch His gentlest tones we hear Him plead with us across the gulf of centuries for love and loyalty and confidence. He asks for a love which is supreme, a loyalty which is undying, and a confidence which is unbounded.

## CHRIST'S PLEA

Are you in distress? Does the weight of sorrow lie heavy on your heart? Are your feet stumbling in the rough ways of life? Has every human help on which you leaned betrayed your trust? Well then, poor heart, if thou be Christian, in Him alone must thou have confidence: "Come to Me all you that labor and are heavy burdened and you shall find refreshment for your souls." Are your steps lagging in the way of virtue? Is the struggle to keep your course along the narrow path a weary one? Are siren voices from the world below luring you from loyalty to the task begun, then, Christian soul, stand firm. Fail not in the task the Master set you, for He Himself has said: "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me is not worthy of Me." Christ pleads for confidence. Christ claims loyalty; but love, love supreme, He commands. Are you a child? You love your father and you love your mother. Around them your affection has woven a garment passing fair, upon their heads your love has set a crown more rich than that of any king. The years of childhood have, perhaps, long since slipped away, you are older now, but even still the first and truest love your life has known is that which bound their hearts to yours. Be it so, there is One who wishes to be loved with greater love than this. It is Christ—"He that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Are you a mother? Do you nurse upon your knee the child so long expected, so eagerly desired, loved so tenderly? There is One who wishes to be more loved than he, One for whose cause you may be even asked to sacrifice this child. It is Christ—"He that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

If there be love more sacred than that of child for parent, more pure than that of mother for child, it is the chaste love of husband for wife and wife for husband. When this great flame has leaped to life within man's heart all other human loves must yield, but the love for Christ must still survive supreme—"If any man come to Me and hate not his wife he cannot be My disciple." Parents are dear, children are dear, husband and

wife are dear, but there is an instinct more primal still, a love more intimate still than any or all of these; it is the love of life itself. But this, even this, must yield place to the overmastering love that Christ demands of all who follow Him—"If any man come to Me, and hate not father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." No mountain peak ever rose higher into a cloudless air than this. The airless summit of Everest is not so far above the steaming plains of India as is the love that Christ demands above all other loves. No heart would dare to scale its heights, no will would dare essay the task did His demand stand alone. What human mind could find the trail leading to its summit? But He who demands this superhuman love, shows us a human way to satisfy its claims. If the one condition of being His follower is that He be received into the innermost places of our hearts, He takes the tenderest thing that human heart can love, a little child, and says to all: "He that receiveth one such little child in My name receiveth Me." Today He is standing in your midst as of old He stood in Palestine. To you He brings today the little ones of St. Joseph's Orphanage as of old He brought little ones of Galilee and Judea to Peter and John and Andrew and James. To you He says as He said to them: "He that receiveth one such little child in My name receiveth Me." The world has changed since then. The lives of men are moulded now in other forms, but the souls of children and the words of Christ are still the same. Ears that have lost forever the sound of a mother's voice are straining now for words of sympathy and love. Eyes that have seen the still, cold features of a father's corpse are turned today to read your hearts. Little feet that will stray unguided into the ways of misery and sin and want, if your charity should fail them now, are stilled for a moment that you may once more bid them trip along the ways of comfort and sweet Christian love—ways that your fathers' charity opened for them in the years gone by. With them, leading them to you, waiting as they do for your answer, is Christ. Do you love Him? Receive them for His love. Do you wish to be loyal to Him? Give, then, of your store, to help their need, even though it be but

a widow's mite. Do you wish to be His followers in the truest sense of all, to be accounted worthy of His love? Then hear again the words He spoke in Galilee: "He that receiveth one such little child in My name receiveth Me."

## War Against Bad Reading

B. LARKIN, O.P.

*The story of how the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Waterford, Ireland, sets an example to all. Reprinted from the "Irish Catholic."*

**A**MONG the many and admirable activities of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Waterford, the Good Literature Crusade stands out in bold relief. The practical zeal and untiring labor of the Brothers in this matter are beyond all praise. The facts and figures which I shall give presently will speak for themselves.

It is a generally received opinion that nothing far-reaching or efficient will be done to stem the tide of bad literature in Ireland till the Government takes action. As things are, the position of the Government is far from enviable; whatever it does is criticized, whatever it fails to do is also criticized. Were it to prohibit absolutely the importation and sale of objectionable literature, a regular chorus of opposition would be raised by those interested in the sale of such literature. There would be a demand for compensation. Moreover, there would be a great diversity of opinion as to what is objectionable or not.

Meanwhile, many of those who have the morality of Ireland really at heart, rest satisfied with criticism and do precisely what the Government is doing—nothing. It is the old story—those sitting idly on the fence consider themselves critics by profession. But while waiting for the Government to act, can nothing be done? The St. Vincent de Paul Society of Waterford have answered that question, and, be it observed, there is not a Catholic church in the country where the same work cannot be done—though, of course, on a smaller scale.



In many cities, towns, and country districts, the Crusade has been taken up already.

### WATERFORD'S ACTIVE CATHOLICS

About five months ago the St. Thomas of Aquin's Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Waterford undertook to distribute Catholic papers, magazines, booklets, and such like at the doors of all the churches of the city, at every Mass on Sundays. At first they secured the help of boys from the schools, but as time went on the excellent work attracted recruits to the Conference, which at present numbers thirty-one members, and now the Brothers themselves do the distribution week in, week out. For a time these enthusiastic men braved rain and storm on Sunday mornings; now they are provided with shelters to save both themselves and the publications from the elements. A "Flag Day" on a Sunday in January realized sufficient funds to meet the cost of the shelters.

During these five months the number of Catholic publications of all kinds—weekly publications, monthly magazines, booklets, and so forth—distributed amounted to seventeen thousand.

But, it may be asked, why is it necessary to resort to such extraordinary means? Why not let the people buy a Catholic paper if they want to, without all this fuss? The answer is humiliating to the last degree from a Catholic point of view. It is simply this, because the taste for Catholic literature is at very low water in Ireland. Politics, racing, and fiction so engross the public mind that comparatively few will buy or read Catholic publications unless they are thrust into their hands. If the reader has any doubt about this statement, will he for curiosity stand in any news-agent's shop in a provincial town for a quarter of an hour on Saturday, when weeklies are purchased, and he will see what a small proportion of Catholic weeklies are asked for, if there is even one.

In this state of the public mind we may well take a lesson from the business firms of the country—we must advertize, we must show our goods. We must not expect people to buy things they have no taste for; we

must *create* a taste, by introducing good reading little by little. A proof of this comes from Waterford, where some of the news-agents, I am told, are selling more Catholic papers at present than they did before the Crusade began, notwithstanding the fact that hundreds of publications are sold at the church doors every Sunday. This also answers the objection that the sale of papers at the church doors will materially injure the news-agents, who thus make their living.

It is to my mind a foregone conclusion that if the Waterford lead is followed and acted upon, the sale—and as a consequence the reading—of Catholic literature will run up by leaps and bounds.

Is the work beyond the capacity of any—the smallest dark church or congregation in the land? Not by any means. How is it to be done? Get together four or six or ten young men—according to the number of Masses—who will be willing to undertake the labor. Begin with, say, three or four dozen of the Catholic papers and magazines. The Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 7 and 8 Lower Abbey St., Dublin, will supply these, and nearly every publication that may be wanted, allowing a discount which ought to cover the carriage and any other incidental expenses. The unsold newspapers are returnable at a cheap rate by rail, so that, with ordinary care, there will be no question of loss to those engaged—rather a small margin of profit<sup>1</sup>

#### HIGHER MOTIVES

So far I have only touched on the necessity of organizing in the circulation of good Catholic literature as an antidote to bad literature. Is there any other motive at hand? Yes, and in a very true sense a more important one—the imparting of Catholic doctrine. Does the Irish reader raise his eyes to heaven in amazement at mention of this—to make children once more of Irish men and women? Well, my dear reader, let me reason a little with you. It is notorious that when our boys and girls leave school they never again take up a catechism or other work of doctrine. They rarely read pious books or saints lives. What is the consequence?

<sup>1</sup>A similar plan is offered by The America Press for the sale of copies before the Church door.

Clearly, that they never improve in their religious knowledge—nay, more, forget much of what they once knew. Many of those youths and maidens emigrate later on, and it is a common opinion of the clergy in England, Scotland, and Wales, for instance, that one of the chief causes of the falling away of our people in these countries is the lack of a sound, practical knowledge of their religion.

Now, the Catholic papers and Catholic publications in general will go a long way in supplying this want. You have doctrine, piety, and the example of saints and holy people put in an attractive way. If some prefer fiction or stories, Catholic writers give us quite an abundant supply. While stressing some point of doctrine, or proposing some bright example of virtue, these Catholic tales are quite fascinating at times, always without the drop of deadly poison found in so many works of the day.

Obviously the cooperation of the clergy is indispensable for the success of the movement. Here, again, Waterford furnishes a headline. Beginning with his lordship the Bishop, the practical sympathy and earnest appeals of the clergy were admirable. The Catholic population were thus aroused to the necessity and importance of the issue, and, as we have seen, they rose to the occasion.

#### SUMMARY

To sum up:

1. Good reading leads to good ideas, and good ideas to a good life—our ideas—or, to put it in another way, our mind and conscience—rule the whole man. Bad reading, on the contrary, fills the mind with bad ideas, and often furnishes wicked example for our imitation, all of which tend to a bad life. Let us encourage the first by organizing. Lessen the second (that is, bad reading) by pushing forward that which is good.

2. How is it to be done?

Let a few energetic young men band themselves together and offer at the church doors on Sundays at the Masses the Catholic papers, magazines, booklets, and so on, beginning with a small number.

3. Is it difficult?

Far from it. Neither will there be a pecuniary loss. Once begun, difficulties will disappear like snow under the sun's rays.

4. What will these promoters of good reading do for Ireland?

They will teach the Irish people to re-learn the lessons on religion which they received at school. They will make them better Catholics. They will enable them to give a reason for the faith that is in them, when they find themselves in a foreign land.

5. What may these young men consider themselves?

Without doubt, the best patriots in the country. What is a true patriot? A true patriot is a lover of the people of his country. But the highest glory of Ireland is her faith, and these young men are working for the faith, unclouded, fully instructed, enlivened by charity.

6. Let Ireland hold her old place still among the nations—a place of special choice by reason of the strength and beauty of her faith. A practical love for good literature will help much towards this end.